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MUSICAL DISCREPANCIES

By ORLANDO A. MANSFIELD

FOR the representation of sound in general, musical notation provides a medium as graphic as it is usually inclusive. But this medium has its limitations both past and present. It has failed, and even now it occasionally fails, to indicate—or to make provision for the indication of—the precise manner in which certain passages of music have been, generally are, and always should be performed. These failures which, for the present, we will call “musical discrepancies,” are due to one of three causes; either the archaic character of the notation itself, the exigencies of execution, or some conventional or traditional method of interpretation.

To every intelligent reader it will at once be perfectly obvious that such differences between musical notation and performance as are due to the first of the foregoing causes are only to be found in the compositions of the older masters,—in works produced at a time when musical notation was still in process of development and musical engraving was crude and immature. Such an age was that of the 17th century and the earlier part of the 18th,—the age of Corelli, Purcell, Bach, Handel, and other musical giants. And as the works of the two last-named celebrities are now accessible in their original notation, and that to a greater degree than are the works of the earlier musicians named, we propose to take most of our illustrations from the compositions of the giant Saxon and the Leipsic Cantor.

A comparatively elementary acquaintance with the productions of the older masters will be sufficient to reveal two glaring inconsistencies in the matter of their musical notation. These so-called inconsistencies occur in regard to two very important features of musical notation, *viz.*:—the triplet and the double dot. The former irregularity we will exemplify by a quotation from Bach’s Fugue in E minor, No. 34, of the Well-tempered Clavichord:



Here, according to modern reading, the 16th-notes in the upper parts should fall *after* the last note of the triplet in the bass. But according to the custom of Bach's age, this 16th-note was inconsistently played *with*, and not after, the last note of the triplet group. To secure this effect a modern composer would write



but such a notation as this was unknown in Bach's day. So here we have our first example of a musical inconsistency caused by an archaic or defective notation. It is scarcely necessary to remind our readers of the comparatively frequent occurrence of this discrepancy in the works of Bach, *e.g.*, the Courante in B flat, from the 1st Partita; the Allemande in G, from the 5th Partita; the Tempo di Gavotta, from the 6th Partita; and the 26th Variation of the Aria con Variazioni in G.

This being granted, it might be well for us to allude to an important employment of this archaic notation by a modern composer, *e.g.*, Schumann, in his Novellette in F, Op. 21, No. 1, where we meet with the following:



the extract being usually performed as if written:



We presume that in this age of widely diffused musical knowledge most of our readers are perfectly aware that this is quite an exceptional case, modern composers almost invariably writing out in full the exact effect they desire to be produced. Consequently,

in most compositions written during the last century and a half, a combination similar to that shown in Ex. 1 is performed precisely as written, the notation of Ex. 2 being employed only when the final notes of the two dissimilar groups are intended to fall together.

That this opinion is not personal, but is held by some of the principal modern authorities on musical theory, the following quotations will fully demonstrate. In the latest edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Mr. Franklin Taylor, the well-known pianist, pedagogue, and musical writer, says:

Handel and Bach, and other composers of the early part of the 18th century, were accustomed to use a convention which often misleads modern students. In 6-8 or 12-8 time, where groups of dotted 8ths followed by 16ths occur in combination with triplets, they are to be regarded as equivalent to quarter-notes and 8ths.

"Thus," says our authority, alluding to a passage similar to that quoted in Ex. 1, "the 16th is not sounded after the third note of the triplet, as it would be if the phrase occurred in more modern music." Professor Peterson, late Professor of Music in the University of Melbourne, opines that

perhaps Bach would have delighted in the modern rhythmic problem of 'four against three,' an effect charming though unauthentic, and it is very probable that the 'dotted' effect was not so pronounced in his generation as it is to-day; but there is no doubt as to the correct interpretation of the sign as the composer intended it.

A second instance of discrepancy between notation and performance, again due to the archaic character of the notation employed, is to be found in some of the more *marcato* passages or movements written in the 17th and earlier 18th centuries. Here, the composers were heavily handicapped owing to the lack of two signs now in common use,—the double dot and the dotted rest. Perhaps it is more correct to say that the dotted rest was really in existence at that period, but not in common use. The double dot, however, was quite unknown, being the invention of Leopold Mozart (1719–1787), and first appearing in the second edition of that noted musician's Violin School, in 1769. Leopold's gifted son, Wolfgang Amadeus, was the first to use the triple dot,—in his Symphony in D, composed in July and August, 1782, for "the wedding, at Salzburg, of a daughter of the Hafners, one of the great merchant families of Germany." Hence, not having any sign for the double dot, musicians of the period now under discussion had to content themselves with the notation of the ordinary dot, trusting to the memories of their students or auditors to

perpetuate a traditional rendering such as would convey to posterity the exact intention of the composer. The late Dr. Ebenezer Prout, perhaps the greatest theorist of the 19th century, writes thus in the preface to his special edition of Handel's *Messiah*:

It is well known to those who have studied the subject, that double dots were never, and dotted rests very seldom used in Handel's time, and that consequently the music, if played strictly according to the notation, will in many places not accurately reproduce the composer's intentions. . . . Among the more important examples of this procedure may be instanced (in the *Messiah* oratorio) the Introduction of the Overture, the Recitative, 'Thus saith the Lord,' and the choruses, 'Behold the Lamb of God,' and 'Surely He hath borne our griefs.'

In such cases, says the gifted editor, "I have felt it my duty to give the notes . . . not as Handel wrote them, but as he meant them to be played." In these remarks the learned Professor was but following, in the year 1902, in the footsteps of that great theorist and composer, Sir George Macfarren, who, in 1884, in his Historical and Analytical Preface to his Performing Edition of the *Messiah*, says:

In Handel's time it was not customary to place a dot after a rest, for the want of which the composer frequently wrote a quaver (8th-note) to precede a dotted quaver and a semiquaver (16th-note), when he meant

the first note to be but a semiquaver, as $\text{r} \cdot \text{J} \cdot \text{J}$ when $\text{r} \cdot \text{J} \cdot \text{J}$ was intended.

Countless instances of this inaccuracy occur throughout his works, but it is fairly illustrated in the recitative 'Thus saith the Lord,' in the first movement of the chorus 'Surely He hath borne our griefs,' and again in the air, 'The trumpet shall sound.'

To quote *in extenso* all the instances of musical inconsistencies just mentioned would be impossible in our present space, so we will content ourselves with one extract referring to the double dot, and one referring to the rest, the former from the opening measures of the Overture, the latter from the symphony to the chorus "Surely He hath borne our griefs." Other examples, including those named by the authorities above mentioned as well as many other additional instances which exist in Handel's supposed masterpiece, we must reluctantly leave our readers to examine for themselves.

Ex. 6 Written Performed (approximately)



But before leaving this portion of our subject we should like to quote, in confirmation of the statements made by Professors Macfarren and Prout, two passages from writers of widely differing periods and schools. Of these extracts the first, from Edward G. Dannreuther's "Musical Ornamentation," reads thus:

In Bach's time double dots were not in use, and the single dot was employed to express prolongation in a somewhat less strict way than we are now accustomed to. Bach, Handel, and all their contemporaries, often take the dot to mean a prolongation *either more or less than one-half*. Many an absurdity will be avoided if this fact is borne in mind.

Our author then proceeds to quote Leopold Mozart's rule that "the dot ought always to be held a little longer," and he claims that this "represents the common practice" down to Mozart's time. "Therefore," says Dannreuther, "the short note following a dot should in most cases be taken at a little less than its true value." Our second quotation, as already intimated, is from a totally different author and written at an entirely different date. It is from the preface to an edition of Handel's Four Coronation Anthems, prepared by Dr. Crotch (1775-1847), sometime Professor of Music in the University of Oxford,—an edition issued by the English Handel Society in 1843. Crotch was a great Handelian scholar and enthusiast, and this is what he has to say concerning such matters as dotted rests, double dots, expression marks, &c. "It was the custom formerly for the composer to teach these particulars at the numerous rehearsals, instead of depending upon the notation." Such being the case, it is but little to be wondered at that musical discrepancies and inconsistencies arose. The only wonder is that they were not more numerous than history and research have proven them to be have been.

We will now turn from a consideration of some of the musical discrepancies arising from imperfect or archaic notation to such as are consequent upon, and even necessitated by, a correct technical execution. Amongst these we will first notice the matter of repeated notes. Our readers will at once realize that these, being written without a rest or other indication of silence between them, cannot be performed in strict accordance with the conventional

notation. This because every repetition necessitates a break in the continuity of sound; and however infinitesimal such a break may be, it is absolutely unavoidable. Hence, the opening chords of Beethoven's fine Pianoforte Sonata in C, Op. 53, commonly known as the *Waldstein*, appear thus:

but what we really hear in performance is, approximately:

Ex. 8

Another discrepancy between notation and performance is caused by the correct technical execution of what is generally known as "phrasing." In keyboard music all students should be aware that when a slur connects two equal notes in rapid or moderate tempo, or two notes of which the first is greater than the second, the second note is shortened, as in the following example from Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonata in D minor, Op. 31, No. 2:

Ex. 9 Written 	Performed 
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Also, when the last note of a group of notes covered by a slur happens to be an accented note, or a note immediately following an accent, this final note is likewise shortened. Here is an example from Sir William Sterndale Bennett's delightful Rondeau à la Polonaise, Op. 37:

Ex.10 Written (a) (b)

Performed

The image shows two staves of musical notation. Staff (a) shows a series of eighth notes with stems pointing down, followed by a sixteenth note with a stem pointing up, and then another sixteenth note with a stem pointing down. Staff (b) shows a sixteenth note with a stem pointing up, followed by a sixteenth note with a stem pointing down, and then a sixteenth note with a stem pointing up. The key signature is one flat, and the time signature is common time.

Here the note at (a) is shortened because the slur ends upon an accent, while the note at (b) is shortened because it is the note immediately following the accent. A somewhat lesser shortening

of time value is observed when a shorter note is slurred to a longer, as in the following quotation from Mozart's Fantasia in C minor, of 1782:

Ex. 11 Written

Performed

Here, it should be noted, the ordinary accent of the measure is not disturbed as is often the case when the slur connects two short notes. Everyone acquainted with the mechanism of and notation for orchestral instruments is perfectly aware that unslurred notes are there subjected to a detached rendering; whereas, in music for keyboard instruments, an unslurred note is played *legato*. The shortening of an unslurred note in the case of the orchestral instruments, accomplished by a fresh movement of the bow in the case of stringed instruments, or by a different "tonguing" in the case of the wind and brass, is never indicated in the notation. In every case we have considered it is left to the taste and discretion of the performer,—an indication of the extent of his knowledge and the accuracy of his execution.

But in this second class of musical discrepancies there are several interesting cases which arise not so much from deficiencies or omissions in the notation, nor even from additions to or subtractions from the noted music, but rather from the commonly accepted manner of the execution of the written copy. Thus, in the case of the appoggiatura or theacciaccatura, while both are written to the *left* of the melody note they ornament, and *before* any accompanying chord, they are almost universally performed in the place of the melody note and, therefore, with and not before any accompanying notes or chords. Thus, the following extract from Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonata in F, Op. 10, No. 2, would exhibit, as below, the difference between notation and actual performance:

Ex. 12 Written

Performed

Similarly, ornaments of two or more notes, such as the double appoggiatura, the slide, &c., are treated in much the same manner

when ornamenting an essential or harmony note, *e.g.*, from the Overture to Boieldieu's Caliph of Bagdad:

Incidentally, however, we may remark that when either of these ornaments, or others of like character, occur before non-essential notes,—passing or auxiliary notes,—the ornaments are executed in the time value of the preceding harmony note, as in the following example from Schubert's Impromptu in B flat, Op. 142, No. 3:

Here A, the second melody note, is a passing note, and the ornament is therefore executed in the time value of the harmony note immediately preceding, and not in the time value of the second melody note itself. The notation of "prepared" shakes, *i.e.*, shakes with one or more small notes prefixed, is often a source of uncertainty to the inexperienced performer. Here we have a discrepancy similar to that previously discussed,—the notation showing the small notes as if the latter were performed before the principal note of the shake, whereas they are part and parcel of the shake itself. We give an example from the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 10, No. 2:

Many other instances will doubtless occur to the interested reader, but the limits of time and space forbid of their discussion here. Reluctantly we are compelled to pass to the third and final division of our subject, in which we are confronted by discrepancies caused by interpretation, either optional or conventional. Taking the former case first, perhaps our meaning may be best illustrated

by a reference to what is generally known as "march rhythm,"

e.g.,  |  Here the tendency—perfectly artistic and legitimate—is to lengthen the dotted notes and shorten those of lesser value which follow the dots, the result—expressed in ordinary notation—being something in this style:  in which the first note is lengthened a quarter and the second shortened a half. Indeed, as every teacher of keyboard instruments and every conductor of an average chorus choir knows only too well, the difficulty is to get inexperienced players and singers to realize this unwritten law of rendition and to deliver a genuine march rhythm with its required and characteristic "snap."

Another interesting musical discrepancy arises from the conventional rendition of a pause, or hold, over an emphatic note or chord. Here, in addition to the fact that the notation gives no clue whatever as to the exact length to which the note or chord affected by the pause is to be prolonged, there is another unwritten rule to the effect that a more or less marked silence or break after the lengthened note or chord is generally admissible and effective. Here is a fine example from Mendelssohn's Organ Sonata in F minor, Op. 65, No. 1:

This silence is especially desirable after each of the pauses marking the closes of the various phrases of the Chorals in Mendelssohn's 5th and 6th Organ Sonatas. Concerning these pauses Dr. Eaglefield Hull, in his interesting edition of these imperishable classics, says—with particular reference to the pauses over the half-notes,— "Classical players count six quarters on the pauses." This gives us a discrepancy crystallized into a custom.

Another discrepancy which we can allude to only *en passant* is that which arises when in keyboard execution one hand is required by the notation to keep up a continuous shake while at the same time "bringing out" a melody. An instance of this, too well known to need quotation, occurs in the Finale of Beethoven's

Sonata in C, Op. 53. A reference to any standard edition in which the ornaments are written out in full in marginal or foot notes will show that this passage is generally executed by interrupting the continuity of the shake at every occurrence of a note of the melody. "The pace at which the whole thing should be taken," says Mr. Francesco Berger, "will cover the gaps, so that the ear cannot detect them." The same solution applies to the "shake" variation in Thalberg's "Home, Sweet Home" Variations and to many similar cases. "It is the notation that is at fault," says the writer last quoted. We agree. Nor must we forget, in this connection, the discrepancy between notation and interpretation which arises from the employment of the so-called *legatissimo* touch in pianoforte playing. This device, a favourite and almost essential one on the thin toned Viennese piano of a century ago, consisted of the holding down, or *tenuto* treatment, of the principal harmony notes of a pianoforte passage. These holding notes were, however, seldom written out in full; but an extended example may be found in Cramer's Study in G sharp minor, No. 26, while passages of similar style but of shorter duration are to be found in several other numbers of this imperishable collection. Beethoven, in the selection of these studies which he made for the use of his nephew, has added several notes in which this discrepancy is not only suggestively insisted upon, as being essential to the proper effect of the composition.

The whole matter is treated in some detail in Moscheles' preface to his 24 Characteristic Studies, Op. 70; but prior to this, Hummel, in his Pianoforte School, had written numerous exercises for the acquirement of this touch, the sustained notes being marked with an asterisk. Perhaps the best explanation we have to-day is that given by Mr. Franklin Taylor in his "Technique and Expression in Pianoforte Playing," and to this we must refer those of our readers desirous of pursuing the matter further. Here we can only add that the employment of this touch in many of the broken chord and Alberti bass figures and accompaniments of the earlier classical works is as essential as it is effective. In the majority of these cases it was the initial note of the group which received *tenuto* treatment. As an excellent example of this we would refer our readers to the bass of the 12th to the 4th measures from the end of the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata in D, Op. 10, No. 3. Here, by sustaining the first note of each group of eighths, the initial phrase of the movement (as found in the 7th and 8th measures from the beginning of the work) will be at once prominent, clearly proving that this must have

been the composer's intention when writing the passage. In modern music and editions these sustained notes are generally indicated by double stems to an extent which, although helpful to the performer, is more or less detrimental to the clearness of the composition. Very frequently it is difficult to see the forest for the trees.

Turning back once more to the writings of the older masters we find, as might reasonably be expected, considerable difference between notation and accepted interpretation. In the domain of instrumental music these discrepancies usually appear between the notation and interpretation of ornaments, especially the shake. Our space, or the lack of it, will permit us to mention only one case,—that of a shake over a dotted note "followed," as Dr. Harding puts it in his "Musical Ornaments," "by a note equal to the dot, completing the beat, or division of the beat." In this case, says our authority, "the shake should end upon the dot, which may be prolonged and the following note shortened," since, he adds, "in music composed before the 19th century the value of the dot was very variable." As an example, Dr. Harding quotes from Bach's Fugue in D minor, No. 36 of the "48," e.g.:

Ex. 17 Written Performed

or

With this ruling agrees Edward Dannreuther in his "Musical Ornamentation," in which, speaking of the ornaments of Bach, he says:

Shakes upon a note with a dot stop at or near the dot—a short note following the dot is usually taken somewhat shorter than it is written.

Or, as Mr. Ernest Fowles writes in his "Studies in Musical Graces," when speaking of the shake in older music:

The shake stops at or immediately before the time-position of the dot. The following sound is not infrequently shortened in value in order to give greater accentual force to the accented sound which in such cases usually follows the sound after the dot.

This rule, as our readers will at once perceive is best illustrated at the cadence in which "the sound after the dot" is always a strongly accented note.

In the domain of vocal music the older masters provide us with one of the most glaring discrepancies we have as yet noticed as occurring between notation and interpretation. This is in the case of the recitative. "Here," says the late Mr. W. S. Rockstro,

"in phrases ending with two or more reiterated notes, it has long been the custom to treat the first as an appoggiatura, a note higher than the rest." This variation generally takes place when two notes of similar pitch occur at the end of a phrase or upon some important accented beat during the progress of the phrase. This deviation from strict notation is justified by the desire of the vocalist to give prominence to accented words or syllables, or to secure the rising or falling inflection which is as important in melodic as in oral diction. Here follow two examples from Handel's *Messiah* which illustrate these points. Ex. 18 is from the Recitative "Thus saith the Lord"; Ex. 19 from the Aria "I know that my Redeemer liveth," the latter exhibiting a method of execution which, in this particular passage or case, Mr. Rockstro considers to be "an obtrusive effect, foreign to the naturalness of the phrase."

Ex. 18 Written

e'en the Messenger of the covenant

Sung

Ex. 19 Written

Re - deem - er liv - eth. For now is Christ ris - en

Frequently sung

The substituted note in recitative repetitions, according to Professor Sir George Macfarren, is "generally, but not always, the one next above" the final note. Quite frequently it is a repetition of the third note from the end of the phrase, this repetition being substituted for the penultimate note, as in the concluding phrase of the recitative from the *Messiah* "He was cut off:"

Ex. 20 Written

was He strick-en

Sung

Concerning the introduction and execution of these and similar vocal discrepancies, Mr. William Shakespeare, the eminent singing teacher, says:

Certain accented notes in a melody, forming as a rule with the bass the intervals of the 11th, 9th, and 7th, . . . were found in course of time so

pleasing to the ear, that they were used by singers before composers dared to break the rules by writing them down, and hence they are, especially in recitatives, often omitted altogether from the printed score, though intended to be sung. The whole question is largely one of musicianship, good taste, and the remembrance of that which one has heard in the performance of works by the best singers of the last forty years.

This practically summarizes the whole situation, so that when we find Sir George Henschel objecting to the insertion of the appoggiatura in serious or oratorio recitative, unless the substituted note be a passing note between two different harmony notes on either side of it, we are reminded of the old Latin adage *de gustibus non est disputandum*.

Our final discrepancy—final only in the sense of being the last to be noticed here—is found in the accompaniment of the *recitativo secco*,—the recitative as instituted by Carissimi, the founder of the oratorio, at the beginning of the 17th century, in which the accompaniment was entirely chordal and not figurative, a form which exists to-day in pretty much the same condition as that in which Carissimi left it. Concerning this form Macfarren sagely remarks:

Composers of this class of music till far later than Handel's time, meant not that the harmony should be sustained as semibreves (whole notes) or minims (half-notes), although they wrote such notes for the bass, but intended that a chord should prevail for the length of the written notes, and be repeated or not, according to the punctuation of the voice part, or according to the singer's need of support.

Thus, the recitative, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive," if worked out as regards the accompaniment, from the original figured bass, would appear as on the second and third staves of Ex. 21. This, however, according to Macfarren, would be executed as shown on the last two staves of the following example:

Ex. 21

Alto

From
Full Score

Macfarren
Version

A musical score consisting of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of one sharp (G major). The top staff contains lyrics: "and shall call His name Em - man - u - el; God with us." The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. The bottom staff shows a harmonic progression with various chords, primarily consisting of eighth notes.

The rendering given by the late Cambridge professor illustrates our final point, namely, the percussion of chords written against the final note of a phrase or passage of vocal recitative. Concerning this our learned authority says, "Neither meant they (the old masters) that the chord should be struck with the final note of a phrase whereon the harmony changes, as is often the habit of inexperienced accompanists to do, by which the enunciation of the last word is rendered indistinct; the chords should be played after, rather than with, the voice at the conclusion and before the voice at the commencement of a sentence." It will at once be apparent that this is most aptly illustrated at the final cadence of the foregoing quotation. Here it is interesting to note that Handel followed the Italian traditions of his day, Bach those of northern Germany. Consequently it is not at all surprising to find that in the full score of Bach's St. Matthew Passion the final chords of the recitative accompaniments are written exactly as they are intended to be performed, and are so transcribed in the vocal score, *e.g.*,

Ex. 22

A musical example labeled "Ex. 22". It shows a single staff of music in treble clef, G major, and common time. The lyrics "to bear His cross." are written below the staff. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns, with a prominent bassoon-like line in the middle of the measure.

It would be beyond the province of this paper to enquire into the traditional English rendering of these Handelian and other

recitatives by 'celli and bassi or by a solo 'cello and basso such as "were performed at Her Majesty's Theatre (London, England) for more than half a century by Lindley and Dragonetti, who always played at the same desk, and accompanied with a perfection attained by no other artists in the world." But, by way of conclusion, we may summarize the musical discrepancy last alluded to by saying that, in the *recitativo secco*, chords falling in the middle of phrases are generally played where and as written; while those at the beginnings of phrases are generally played before the entry of the voice, and those at the end of phrases after the cessation of the voice. These points are all illustrated in Ex. 21.

In his excellent vocal score edition of the *Messiah*, the late Mr. W. T. Best, gives a pause over the rest preceding the final chords, thus intending to show that these chords must fall later than the concluding notes of the vocal part, although written exactly underneath the latter. Indeed, in this connection we know of no more profitable task than the critical comparison of the three masterly editions of Macfarren, Best, and Prout, since it would be almost impossible to find three Handelian editors more "deeply learned" in Handelian lore and tradition. About as much knowledge may be gathered in this way as by the attending of any performance of the oratorio, unless such performance be adequate in every respect, and conducted by one thoroughly familiar with the discrepancies of Handelian notation and the traditional renderings thereof.

At least one important fact is established by the present discussion, and that is that musical notation, although wonderfully graphic, is not, and probably will never be, an exact science. And even if it could be so reduced to-day, by to-morrow there would be occurring some discrepancies or inaccuracies caused by a new method of execution, or by a reading productive of some new musical effect. Provided such methods and readings clarify rather than obscure the composer's meaning and neither modify nor misrepresent his original intentions, such discrepancies may be permitted and perhaps welcomed. But any other departures from strict notation are unjustifiable, and those who indulge in such are like the Miltonian detractors, of whom the poet said:

Licence they mean when they cry Liberty!